

Head Injury and Prevention

Call

Call the doctor if your child:

- Hits his head and loses consciousness (gets knocked out).
- Has large bruises or bleeding you cannot stop.
- Cries for more than 10 minutes without stopping after a head injury.
- Has a headache that gets worse.
- Has forceful vomiting or vomits more than once within 24 hours of hitting his head.
- Acts confused for more than the first few minutes after the fall.
- Has a change in his behavior. Your child may seem agitated or may be hearing/seeing things that other people don't.
- Is very sleepy and difficult to wake up.
- Has changes in his vision or hearing.
- Has a seizure (convulsion).
- Has weakness in one side of the body, or he is refusing to use an arm or leg.
- Has eyes that do not look the same. The eyes may be crossed or the pupils (black dots in the eyes) are not the same size.
- Is having difficulty breathing, a change in his breathing, or has a blue color to his lips, tongue or face.
- Could have ingested something that is not food (household cleaners, chemicals, alcohol, or medicines).

All falls in which an infant (under 1 year of age) hits his head should be reported to your doctor.

There are three basic types of head injury:

- 1. Scalp Injury:** This type of injury is very common in children and is typically caused by falling down. You may see a bruise, cut, or bump on the head.
- 2. Skull Fracture:** This is a broken bone in the head. It is not as common and more difficult to see on the scalp surface. Your child may complain of headache at site where injury occurred.
- 3. Concussion:** This is a brain injury typically caused by a sudden hit or jolt to the head. Signs of a concussion: headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, confusion, forgetting what happened around the time of the injury, acting dazed, or loss of consciousness (being knocked out).

What can you do to care for a child with a head injury?

- **Wound Care:** Clean cuts and scrapes with soap and water. If there is bleeding, apply pressure with a clean cloth for 10 minutes. If the bleeding does not stop, call for help. If there is swelling, apply ice wrapped in cloth for 20 minutes.
- **Medication:** You should not give pain medication. If your child is in pain, you should consult a doctor.
- **Rest:** Encourage your child to lie down and rest. You can allow your child to sleep, but you should monitor him closely. Awaken him at least twice through the night (once right after bedtime and then four hours later). Make sure he is able to talk and walk. Ask him some things that he knows how to answer. Look for changes in his eyes. If he doesn't wake up, immediately call for help.

The Facts:

Most head injuries aren't serious and don't cause any long-term problems for a child. If your child has had only a light bump to the head, he may cry for a short time and then go back to playing. In this case, you can take care of your child at home. But it is important to know when a head injury could be serious, so you can seek appropriate medical care for your foster child.

- Children who are learning how to walk and climb fall very frequently.
- Infants are more likely to suffer serious head or brain injuries when they fall.
- Many children of all ages fall and hit their head during normal play.
- Head injuries can also occur with car accidents, bicycle falls, sports injuries, and child abuse.